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**MÁRTON ROSKA AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN TRANSYLVANIA:  
FROM EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> TO 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY.  
SOME CRITICAL NOTES TO THE HUNGARIAN-ARMENIAN  
SCHOLARS EARLY MEDIEVAL STUDIES  
AND RECENT EVOLUTION OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN TRANSYLVANIA**

*'Il ne faut pas toucher aux idoles: la dorure en reste aux mains'*  
Gustave Flaubert: *Madame Bovary*

ABSTRACT

E. Gáll 2012. *Márton Roska and archaeology in Transylvania: from early 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some critical notes to the Hungarian-Armenian scholars early medieval studies and recent evolution of archaeology in Transylvania*, AAC 47: .

The critical analysis found in Roska's works, one that I find contains his most important observations, puts our archaeology to shame as hardly any progress has been made since Roska died.

When analysing Roska's works it is important to note that they display progress, keeping up with his excavations and excavations of other researchers of the same age. His observations show a definite progress from the rigid historical description (as in the second part of his article analysing the cemetery at Moldovenesti) towards archaeological observations and analysis.

By examining Roska's work we tried to grasp some of the major problems of early medieval archaeology and the stage of the research on this problem. It is not unfortunate that 70 or 100 years ago Márton Roska drew rigid ethnic frames or that he did not mention the Avar-Gepid or Avar-Slav relations at all. What is unfortunate is that that this tendency has hardly changed in the archaeology in Romania as of 2012 where ethnic frames are conceived and described as a rigid, stable biological reality rather than a fluid social phenomenon and that all of this massive backwardness in theoretical research is united by some scholars some with the forced topos of the "autochthon-Christian-settled", "migrator", "proto-Romanian" and "Romanian" populations.

**Key words:** Transylvanian Basin; Migration Period; Early Medieval Period; Márton Roska; Avars; Gepids; Slavs; Magyars; history of archaeology

Received: 23.03.2012; Revised: 06.07.2012; Revised: 01.08.2012; Accepted: 29.12.2012

JUSTIFICATION

It is 100 years since Márton Roska (15 June 1880–21 July 1961) excavated the cemetery from the Árpadian age in Hunedoara and so started the research of cemeteries associated with 11<sup>th</sup> century county centres (in this sense: Bóna

1998; Gáll 2013, vol. I, 837–843, 919–926)<sup>1</sup>. A hundred years later the research on early medieval cemeteries (like the research of that entire age) lags behind: none of the cemeteries of the county centres have been fully excavated, several were excavated but never published, analyses in publications are scanty and in terms of methodology and theory the studies are closer in many cases to Trojan heroes than to the multidisciplinary researches of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Roska's critical analyses which we consider his most important contribution could put our modern archaeology to shame as hardly any progress has been made since his time. The best example of this is the recently published cemetery at Bratei (Bârzu 2010) which was developed with great care but the lack of analyses and the loss of the osteological material led Radu Harhoiu (2010) to draw conclusions similar to those formulated by István Kovács (1880–1955) when he published the material from the cemetery at Bandu de Câmpie almost a hundred years earlier (Kovács 1913).

## INTRODUCTION

M. Roska, the most colourful figure in Transylvanian archaeology, and his contribution to this field of research, are recently in focus, in a renaissance of interest of sorts, with several studies published or awaiting publication, in English, Hungarian and Romanian (Vincze 2005; Gáll 2010a, 286–305; 2012).

M. Roska's name and his works are closely connected to the archaeological school of Béla Pósta (1862–1919) established in Cluj (Kolozsvár; Klausenburg)<sup>2</sup> at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as one of its important representatives, first a student and later a teacher (on the archaeological school of B. Pósta in Cluj, see: Buday 1925; Banner 1963; Csorba 1971; Ferenczi 1999; Vincze 2002; 2003; 2004; Langó 2005, 207–210; 2007, 99–103). His life and career was overshadowed by the legacy of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy<sup>3</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> The present study was written with the financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007–2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under project number POSDRU 89/1.5/S/61104.

<sup>2</sup> For the list of contemporary (Romanian) but also Hungarian and German names of archaeological sites mentioned in this article see Table 1.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., on the history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, see: Szekfű 1920; 1934; Gratz 1934; Fejtő 1988; Deák 2000, 59–80; Helczmanovszki 1979; Eddie 2004; Somogyi 2007. We cannot agree with the opinion of some contemporary Hungarian historians that Hungarian politics was not lenient enough in relation to ethnic minorities. In its day the Austro-Hungarian monarchy may have been one of the most liberal countries in the world in terms of national rights as compared to other countries (Russia, France, Spain, etc). It is a little known fact that the Hungarian Parliament was the first in history to pass a bill on the status of national minorities and nationalities in 1868. For possibly the first positive evaluation of Austro-Hungary in Romanian see: Neumann 2001, 68–102. On the positive influence of the monarchy which could be felt later see the following observation made by Neumann: “[...] Aceasta a avut loc nu întâmplător într-unul din centrele din vestul țării, la Timișoara, unde minimele repere democratice

the era of revolutions or rather, of *revolution running amuck* (1918–1920)<sup>4</sup>, the Romanian Kingdom (1920–1936)<sup>5</sup>, Hungary ruled after the Treaty of Trianon by Horthy (1937–1944), and subsequently, Soviet Communist Hungary ‘liberated’ (1944/45) by the Russians.

Márton Roska (Fig. 1) was born on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1880 in Cubleşu Someşan, *Comitatus Kolosiensis* (Komitat Klausenburg; Kolozs vármegye; Comitatul Cluj; Cluj county) in the Kingdom of Hungary, and was raised in an orphanage. The evolution of his identity bears the dual mark so specific to Armenians living in Transylvania: alongside his Armenian origin (which he considered to be his national identity) he considered Hungarian as his native language. In 1900,



Fig. 1. Márton Roska (1880–1961);  
Photo by an unknown Photographer

after graduating from high school, he enrolled in the department of philosophy, literature and history at the University of Cluj. In 1903 he became research assistant at the Transylvanian Institute of Archaeology and Numismatics. He graduated in 1904 and the next academic year (1905–1906) was appointed assistant at the Department of Archaeology, a position subsequently extended. During this time he gathered numerous prehistoric and Roman artifacts from isolated excavation sites like Cubleşu Someşan, Corneşti, Lacu, Feldioara, Cetan, Pintic, etc. In 1904 he was delegated by B. Pósta to Deva where he helped with the systematization of the local museum collections<sup>6</sup>.

au fost întreţinute de o populaţie cu identităţi culturale şi religioase multiple, moştenind ceva din reflexele mentale ale metropolelor cosmopolite imperiale de altădată” (Neumann 2001, 127). On the historiography of the dualist era: Gyurgyák 2007; Erős 2011.

<sup>4</sup> In our view the best analysis of the period marked by such eminent names as Mihály Károlyi (1875–1955), Oszkár Jászi [1875–1955], Béla Linder (1876–1962), and Béla Kun (1886–1939) and on the Peace Treaty of Trianon (1920), see: Gratz 1935; Mályusz 2005. For a similarly objective analysis of the Trianon disaster, see: Romsics 2001.

<sup>5</sup> The key publications on Romanian history in the interbellum years: Volovitch 1991; Hitchins 1994; Boia 1997; 2005; Lavastine 1998; Livezeanu 1998; Neumann 2001, 103–120; Zub 2005. From the point of view of a nationalist and communist Romanian: Scurtu 1996; 2002.

<sup>6</sup> He wrote about his work at Deva in a letter to his superior, B. Pósta; see Vincze 2005, 9.

Meanwhile, his academic career continued. In 1908 he defended his Ph. D. on the influence of the Mediterranean on the Neolithic funerary rituals of the Carpathian Basin. In 1912 he was promoted and in 1913 received credentials in palaeontology (Vincze 2005, 10). By 1914 he had made several study trips abroad: in 1908 he received a European scholarship, during which he toured museums across Berlin, Brussels and Paris. The following year, in 1909, he visited museums in Germany and in the Czech-Moravian region. In 1912 he participated in an excavation in Frankfurt am Main where he had the opportunity to demonstrate how a skeleton should be investigated, recorded and lifted from its grave. That same year he attended the international congress of archaeology and anthropology in Munich (Roska 1927, 351–352).

The outbreak of the First World War held back many of his plans, including his intention to continue excavating sites at Gâmbaş and Unirea-Vereşmort. In September 1920 M. Roska took an oath of abjuration to the Romanian state but was not demoted to the position of assistant. In 1924 he was promoted to the position of project supervisor at the Institute while Á. Buday was appointed chairman of the Department of Archaeology at Szeged. Subsequently he became member of the Commission for Historical Monuments for the Transylvanian section. In 1928 he passed the Romanian language exam with excellent marks. During the Great Depression (1929–1933) M. Roska mostly engaged in having his excavation materials published in print, in a repertoire that would see light only in 1942. In order to avoid personal disaster he asked for permission to retire and filed a request for a study trip abroad, a request which was denied. Amid these tensions, and because he had published in the volume on Transylvanian archaeology of the tenth century coordinated by Miklós Asztalos (1899–1986; see Roska 1936b), he was accused by Constantin Daicoviciu (1898–1973) during a press conference<sup>7</sup> and, in due course, suspended from his academic position (11<sup>th</sup> June 1936; cf. Vincze 2005, 13). After several search raids, on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1936 he was sentenced to three years in prison, forced to pay 5000 lei and lost all his civil rights during the sentence<sup>8</sup>. The next day the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940)<sup>9</sup> demanded the immediate suspension of this inhuman sentence (*Neamul Românesc*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1936). Following an amnesty act passed on the national day of that year, Roska was released on 1<sup>st</sup> December<sup>10</sup> but, unable to return to his previous university position, decided to leave Romania.

<sup>7</sup> According to Tudor Soroceanu, before 1936 Roska had helped C. Daicoviciu to obtain financial aid to continue his studies. C. Daicoviciu was assisted in court by Sándor Ferenczi who was a witness in this case. Acknowledgements to T. Soroceanu for this input.

<sup>8</sup> *Patria*, November 14<sup>th</sup> 1936; information from Vincze 2005, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Based on T. Soroceanu's data, for this assistance Iorga asked the Armenian community for permission to make a research in their archives which were closed to non-Armenians. I would like to express my acknowledgment for these data to T. Soroceanu.

<sup>10</sup> *Keleti Újság*, December 5<sup>th</sup> 1936; after Vincze 2005, 14.

Major events occurred in M. Roska's life after the Second Vienna Award (30<sup>th</sup> August 1940). On 19<sup>th</sup> October 1940 he became the head of the Institute of Archaeology and Numismatics, and lecturer in prehistoric archaeology at the university, which had moved back from Szeged to Cluj. The German university administration model was revived in Cluj: in parallel to the Department of Archaeology (with a very substantial autonomy) the Institute of Archaeology was also re-established.

In October 1944 several of Roska's colleagues were deported to the Ural Mountains and only György Szabó returned a year later. Others took refuge in Hungary. Soon afterwards M. Roska followed them to Hungary, never to return to the *Garden of fairies* (the Hungarian romantic name for Transylvania). In Hungary the last years of his life were quite bleak. Because he was not a member of the communist party he was given the cold shoulder, as many intellectuals of that period. These chaotic political and social changes and turmoil certainly left a mark on Roska's personality, his way of thinking, not to mention his professional opportunities.

In the first years of the communist regime M. Roska worked as a professor at Szeged University, and from 1950, at the Institute of Geology. During this time he led an archaeological excavation in the Bakony Mountains. Due to health problems in 1955 he was unable to accept the invitation from the Institute of Geology to excavate in the Tokaj area.

In 1956 he rose in defence of Cardinal Mindszenty, with serious consequences. Roska's troubled life ended on 16 July 1961, his final resting place the Farkasrét cemetery in Budapest (Körök 1962, 89).

There is no denying that the downfall of the Kingdom of Hungary and its dismemberment at Trianon was a turning point in the life of Márton Roska. The peace treaty had serious impact on his future life and on the way he saw things, something that was aggravated by his arrest in 1919<sup>11</sup>. After 1920 Roska's archaeological papers were written in keeping with a conception (although this is not too obvious in his works) close to that advanced by Gyula Szekfű (1883–1955), the main authority in Hungarian historiography of the interbellum period. We refer here to the fundamental works of this excellent Hungarian historian, written in 1920 and 1934, their anti-liberal conception and criticism of the turmoil of the October Revolution which had significant influence on the historical conception of the interbellum period (cf. Szekfű 1920; 1934; Erős 2009). Gy. Szekfű's historical conception was similar to the concept of *Primat der Aussenpolitik* advanced by Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) and Augustus Meineke (1790–1870) as opposed to the idealist, unrealistic theory on the confederation of nations in the Danube region (Erős 2009).

Roska's commitment, or at least, his sympathy towards the German cultural region and German ideas, is poorly documented by hard facts. But it is

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<sup>11</sup> Cluj was captured by the Romanian army on Christmas Day of 1919 and Roska was arrested soon afterwards; see Vincze 2005, 7–8.

telling that in 1932 he published an article in the scholarly journal *Germania* and called himself *Martin von Roska*<sup>12</sup>. To be sure, this is not surprising, for several reasons: he was faced with many personal and scientific problems in Great Romania during the period between the two world wars. His relationship with Vasile Pârvan (1882–1927), archaeologist and theoretician of Romanian nationalism<sup>13</sup>, was really bad at this time<sup>14</sup>, and he also had to face the attacks of extremist Romanian university professors, which ultimately led to his demotion, arrest and emigration to Hungary, in 1936 (for further details, see: Gáll 2010a, 289; 2012).

### AN OUTLINE SYSTEMATIZATION OF ROSKA'S EARLY MEDIEVAL STUDIES

Roska's studies may be seen to progress parallel to archaeological excavation work carried out by him and other archaeologists<sup>15</sup>, his observations gradually evolving from a rigorous historical interpretation of archaeological material (e.g., as in the second part of his article analysing the cemetery at Várfalva, now Moldovenești) in the direction of archaeological inquiry. Let us note that the practical instruction offered by B. Pósta's school was unique in Hungarian archaeology on the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as opposed to the great figures of that time who were content to rely on excavations carried out by amateurs. In fact, we can argue that if not for the political transition Pósta's school may have developed into a leading archaeological school of East Central Europe<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> He went under the name of *Martin von Roska* in the journal *Közlemények az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régisegtárából* (Journal of the Coin and Antique Collection of the Transylvanian National Museum) of which he was editor.

<sup>13</sup> "Naționalismul nu e ținta supremă a spiritualizării, ci a materialului brut, care are a fi înnobilit prin gândirea general-umană, astfel încât creațiunile lui să devină pretutindeni și etern valabile. Ești național în orice creațiune a culturii superioare nu conștient, voit, ci inconștient, fatal. Dar întocmai cum nu vrei, ci ești, fără voia ta, în opera de artă, liric or epic, tot așa ești, fără să vrei, național în sufletul tău", cf. Pârvan 1997, 19. The criticism of nation-states and their future and the opinion that they are the real prisons, see: Vincent 2002, 48.

<sup>14</sup> "It is a mistake to assume in your letter that you can deal with me as with your equal, on the basis of equal responsibility. You are one of the many contributors placed under my command at the national Romanian Institute of Archaeology. If you were to leave for Hungary I would not be losing a half of the archaeological potential of the Romanian Kingdom, but a much smaller part, on which I am working to replace by nurturing young and clever researchers on the prehistoric period who are studying both here and abroad. Therefore I believe that you, as a legal citizen of the Romanian state and an objective scholar, have the obligation to justify your honourable position as project supervisor within a Romanian university by publishing scientific papers in Romanian journals"; Pârvan 1983, 275; see also Anghelina 2003, 127, Footnote 397.

<sup>15</sup> I refer here chiefly to excavations carried out in Sântana de Mureș and Bandu de Câmpie by István Kovács, fellow archaeologist and friend.

<sup>16</sup> The archaeological school in Cluj closed in 1920. The international research projects (such as establishing the Mesopotamian Institute) that B. Pósta had been working on would never be completed or, one might say, they became *victims* of history (see Vincze 2003; on the importance of the Pósta school from a Romanian point of view, see: Harhoiu 2004b).



Table 1

List of principal archaeological sites mentioned in study

	Romanian name	Hungarian name	German name
1.	Aiud	Nagyenyed	Straßburg am Mieresch, Stroßbrich
2.	Alba Iulia old R.: Bălgrad	Gyulafehérvár	Karlsburg, Weissenburg, Keist
3.	Bandu de Câmpie	Mezőbánd	Bendorf
4.	Biharea		Bihar
5.	Bratei	Baráthely	Pretai
6.	Gâmbaş	Marosgombás	
7.	Hunedoara	Vajdahunyad	Eisenmarkt, Hunnedeng
8.	Luna	Aranyoslóna	Lohne
9.	Moldoveneşti old R.: Varfalău	Várfalva	Burgdorf
10.	Noşlac	Marosnagylak	Grosshaus
11.	Pecica	Magyarpécska	Petschka
12.	Şpălnaca	Ispánlaka	
13.	Stremţ	Diód	Nussschloss
14.	Târgu Mureş	Marosvásárhely	Neumarkt, Neumarkt am Mieresch, Nai Muark
15.	Tárnăveni old R. Diciosânmartin	Dícsőszentmárton	Sankt-Martin, Marteskirch, Mierteskirch
16.	Turda	Torda	Thorenburg, Torembrih
17.	Unirea-Vereşmort	Rothberg	Marosveresmart
18.	Vărşand		Gyulavarsánd

Roska's main subject of interest was Migration Period (Germanic, Avar, Hungarian Conquest, Árpadian age) as reflected by his archaeological excavations: 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>-century cemeteries in Hunedoara (1911), cemeteries at Moldoveneşti and Gâmbaş (1912), Avar graves at Marosgombás (1913), the Gepid (?) area of the cemetery from the Avar era (1914). In 1923–1924 he excavated at Bihor, in 1930 at Vărşand<sup>17</sup>. Roska's excavation of the settlement cemetery and the churchyard cemetery at Magyarpécska is not known in closer detail.

<sup>17</sup> For lists and tables from excavations made by M. Roska between 1910 and 1919, and in 1920–1930, spanning the Palaeolithic and the Middle Ages, based on Zoltán Vincze's researches, see: Gáll 2010a, Tables 1–2.

Without discussing each and every detail mentioned in M. Roska's papers we shall focus only on his most important conclusions.

Based on his field researches and excavations Roska's analyses on the Early Middle Ages may be divided into three main periods (*cf.* Table 2)<sup>18</sup>.

Table 2

Periodization of Roska's analyses on the Early Middle Ages

	Time periods	Type of study
1.	1911–1914	Monographic studies, and the time of historizing
2.	1927–1936	The making of syntheses
3.	1941–1944	Investigating individual elements of material culture

To be sure, the division into three time periods proposed here is a technical exercise, the names are technical terms, as we only wished to indicate the main characteristics of Roska's studies within individual time periods, this does not mean that in the *making of syntheses* period<sup>19</sup> Roska's name can be associated only with synthetic studies, nevertheless his most significant output at this time were syntheses (Roska 1927; 1936a; 1936b). Neither does *the time of historizing* heading fully correspond to reality: this was the first time in the history of Hungarian archaeology that Márton Roska, in his monographs publishing the cemeteries at Moldovenesti and Hunedoara, gave a detailed archaeological description of a length equal to that of the grave descriptions (Roska 1913; 1914). At the same time we must also note that contrary to expectations the report on the burial site at Vereşmort, published in 1932 in *Germania*, contains no interpretative analysis, possibly, for objective reasons (?)<sup>20</sup>.

Although during the first two periods (mainly focused on the Hungarian Conquest and Early Árpadian age; see Roska 1913; 1914; 1927; 1930; 1932), due to the nature of the analyses, some connections can be observed, the character, and in many cases, the conception of his studies written in the third period (1940–1944), is fundamentally different from his earlier contributions. In analyses of various elements of 10<sup>th</sup>-century material culture written by Roska during World War II there is evidence that he was following the research

<sup>18</sup> We wish to emphasize that these *time periods* are only based on his studies focused on the Migration Period, the Hungarian Conquest and the age of Árpadian kings.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., from this period we have a publication of cemeteries at Valea Iui Mihai and Vereşmort, in 1930 and 1932; *cf.* Roska 1930; 1932.

<sup>20</sup> In the publication of cemeteries at Sântana de Mureş and Bandu de Câmpie, I. Kovács had combined the presentation of the material with a comprehensive archaeological interpretation, two decades before Roska would publish his article in the journal *Germania*. In his two articles Kovács set the mark for the archaeology of the Hungarian conquest at such a high level that it was matched only by N. Fettich when he published Cemetery No. 2 at Kenézlő in 1931; *cf.* Fettich 1931, 48–112.



methods developed by Nándor Fettich (1900–1971), a respected authority on the period of the Hungarian conquest of the interbellum period<sup>21</sup>, and it may not be a coincidence that as Director of the Transylvanian Scientific Institute Roska's relationship with Gyula László (1910–1998) was anything but ideal<sup>22</sup>.

In his studies M. Roska addressed a number of major themes, discussed at more length below.

## THE EVALUATION OF THE MAIN TOPICS IN ROSKA'S STUDIES

### Interpreting the concept of Transylvania, Cultural discontinuity versus Continuity of settlement

Already in his 1936 synthesis on Transylvania<sup>23</sup> and the Migration Period Roska addressed the highly sensitive issue, analysed more recently by Sebastian Brather (2004), and one dismissed by the leading Romanian archaeologists (e.g.: Theodorescu [ed.] 2001; 2010; Madgearu 2011): there is evidence throughout the prehistoric age of recurring periods of *a cultural discontinuity* within the Transylvanian Basin.

To be sure, cultural discontinuity does not necessarily mean ethnic discontinuity, several recurring periods of cultural discontinuity can be observed (Brather 2004), but there is another important aspect that has not been emphasized, probably because the results afforded by sociology and social psychology were not taken into account, cultural change may significantly modify the cultural features of a given population. True to the spirit of his age, Roska concluded that the emergence of cultural features was a unified phenomenon, but what is more serious is that in contemporary Romanian archaeology this tendency has changed but little. For example, Roman rule gave rise to a number of different identities rather than a single unified Roman Dacian identity, the one that pervades the theory of Daco-Roman continuity, therefore it is invalid to speak of a Daco-Roman cultural identity and language continuity. In the Roman provinces we can generally expect to see three forms of

<sup>21</sup> On significance of N. Fettich's work in the history of research see: Párducz 1972; Ilon 2001a, 399–402; 2001b, 474–485; Tóth 2001; Kiss 2001; Mesterházy 2001; Hoppál 2001; Langó 2007, 104–110.

<sup>22</sup> All of this is made clear in Roska's letter: "[...] this excavation is the excavation of the museum led by myself, which is funded by the Scientific Institute and whose leadership dr László was kind enough to undertake, but before his highness....(illegible) it was my practicing student, Antal Pálffy who made them...during the excavations once he happened to send me a visiting card as if nothing had happened, in which he referred to my great experience in a flattering manner asking me to go out to that significant grave to give him advice etc., but I could not grant his request as I could not give up my principles". This sentence casts light on Roska's far from ideal personal and professional relationship with Gy. László.

<sup>23</sup> *Transylvania* is interpreted correctly as the Transylvanian Basin.

group identity (imperial, provincial, and municipal) their significance dependent on various circumstances (Niculescu 2009, 205–206). Let us note that in Dacia group identity could only have taken shape after the conquest; this is because the Dacian elite had bled itself dry in wars against the Romans; therefore, there was no one to hand down their special local identity to the next generation (Assman 1992)<sup>24</sup>. The end of the Roman rule definitely put an end to imperial and municipal identities, the only question is whether there was any distinctively Dacian provincial identity after AD 271. How homogeneous could this Dacian triple identity have been?<sup>25</sup> We can see clearly from the archaeological record that the panorama is a multicoloured one, thus it would be quite dangerous to speak about the form of expression of a single ethnic group drawing on the evidence from burial customs and material culture from the territory of former Dacia<sup>26</sup>. We need to ask what centrifugal forces or elite groups could have created a typical post-Roman identity (sic!) after the fall of the province (if we cannot talk about it during the provincial period) which led directly to a proto-Romanian, and later, a Romanian identity. It is evident that in Romanian historical tradition this view is the legacy of 19<sup>th</sup>-century nationalism (Boia 1997, 11–23, 91–124).

Roska's historical view of Transylvania during the Migration Period is similarly one-sided, but in a different way: he addresses the concept of the recurring cultural discontinuity in his introduction, where he writes: “[...] the outer properties are the same, it is just the bearers of culture who change, filling these frames with a new content [...]” (Roska 1936a, 151). Nevertheless, a few pages later he mentions a 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century *Gepid* cemetery at Unirea-Vereşmort (Roska 1936a, 154), which name definitely can be connected to a group identity, supposing a continuity, biological and continuity of identity of the Germanic population of the Gepid Kingdom under Avar rule, the selfsame thing he has denied in his introduction. As a result of this theory, which can be traced back to I. Kovács, due to the influence of various schools and political regimes, some researchers have refused to acknowledge the presence of Avars in Transylvania before AD 670, at most they were ready to allow for the presence of Avarized Gepids (Horedt 1958a; 1958b; 1968; 1977; 1986; Harhoiu 2010; Hica 1974; Gaiu 1992, 122). In these analyses the question of to what extent the Gepid population of the Avar era resembled their ancestors and to what extent their community and individual status within the Avar Khaganate defined their customs and values, are completely ignored

<sup>24</sup> Our thanks go to Daniel Spănu for his friendly advice and for bringing this work to our attention.

<sup>25</sup> The sheer number of pagan deities and their origin (Greek, Roman, Celtic, Eastern, Danubian) suggests a mixed population with a heterogeneous mentality. Therefore one cannot speak of homogeneity during the provincial period. And this makes the idea of continuity of a ‘Roman’ identity historically untenable; see *Catalog...* 2012, 7–87.

<sup>26</sup> Cemeteries as the one excavated in Petőfi Street, Napoca, suggest such a variety; cf. Benea–Hica 2004, 221–237.

or have not even occurred to these researchers. Nevertheless, this obvious contradiction in the text only goes to show that the Transylvanian archaeologist was full of doubt as to the phenomenon and its interpretation.

### Márton Roska and the ethnic conception

In early medieval archaeology (both professional and amateur), emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the definition of ethnicity was stressed. Starting from early 20<sup>th</sup> century the connection between material culture and ethnic identity has been interpreted in the light of Gustaf Kossinna's (1858–1931) well known theory which states that geographical areas are characterised by a unified *material culture* and this corresponds to an *ethnic entity* and consequently, the culture of a people was identified with certain arbitrarily selected elements of material culture and the people were identified with them (Kossinna 1911; 1936, 315). This also has other serious consequences, namely that a given *ethnic group* is regarded as a biological and linguistic entity (e.g.: Theodorescu [ed.] 2001). *Archaeological cultures* developed from Kossinna's theory<sup>27</sup> whose present-day counterparts are national cultures developed during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century emergence of national identity, and in this way, a modern conception was thrust upon population structures that have nothing to do with them, mainly for chronological reasons. Thus, when specialists speak of elements of the Gîlna or the Cotofeni cultures, the latter of which brings 20<sup>th</sup>-century Romanian political unity to mind, they are thinking of the structural institution of the modern state, as by this term they mean all the elements of a material culture which is spread across that same region. According to this way of thinking an archaeologist can reach different peoples of prehistoric times drawing on these elements of the archaeological cultures and can reconstruct various migrations, connections between these peoples and, obviously, understand processes of the ethnogenesis of different people. However, the *unity* of (archaeological) cultures is not Kossinna's 'invention', only a mental construct of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if we can say so, it is just the 'development' of Kossinna behind which there is a modern day myth, the myth of national 'unity' (Boia 1997, 157). National culture is such a construct of a 'unity' myth (Boia 1997, 157).

This conception, which was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and reached its peak in the 20<sup>th</sup>, defined Roska's historical and archaeological analyses on the Early Middle Ages.

The first of these, publication of cemeteries at Hunedoara and Várfalva, apart from having a major impact on the research history, are Roska's most

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<sup>27</sup> We need to bear in mind that G. Kossinna was a *linguist* and this had significant bearing on his theory. I owe this piece of intelligence to Péter Prohászka.

*historizing* pieces. On the one hand, for the first time in the history of research Roska demonstrated by archaeological means the presence of an archaeological reality in Transylvania which can be linked to the *conquering Hungarians*, on the other hand, in the second part of his study presenting the cemetery at Moldovenești, he embarks on an historical interpretation which can hardly be substantiated or followed: he seems to discern Black Hungarians and Szeklers in the finds from the Mureș valley, and the folk of the *kende* in the Someș valley.

With time Roska's theories improved somewhat, as shown by synthetic studies written in 1927 and 1936. In keeping with the way of thinking typical for his times Roska identifies peoples known from the written sources with cemeteries investigated during archaeological excavation, which means that he thought and made interpretations along the lines of group identity. With time, the rigid concepts of his age became much more refined, thanks to ethnological and sociological researches: group identities can be varied and they need not necessarily be connected to ethnic identities, in fact they rarely are. However, it is important that Roska does not necessarily identify various elements of material culture with an ethnos known from the written sources, but he supposes a particular *people* based on all the elements in graves, which shows a difference from the object-centred concept and interpretation of German archaeology. For instance, in his study on Transylvania and the Migration Period published in 1936 Roska connects the cemeteries at Sântana de Mureș and Târgu Mureș with the Tervings, or possibly, the Visigoths, but he defines these peoples mainly on the basis of the burial custom. He defined the Gepids and the Avars in a similar way<sup>28</sup>. Nevertheless, ethnological and sociological researches of more recent decades demonstrate that burial customs need not be identified with an ethnos (for relevant reference literature see: Niculescu 2009, 22–23), and so, *horse burials* or *buried horses* do not necessarily denote an *Avar* or *Avar influence*. Since Roska's times and works hardly any progress has been made in research and until recently horse burials in small cemeteries used to be identified with Avars whereas larger cemeteries were attributed by researchers to *horse breeding peoples* or, alternately, to *Avarized Gepids* (Horedt 1958a; 1958b; 1968; 1977; 1986; Harhoiu 2010; Stanciu 2002; 2008)<sup>29</sup>. Unfortunately, in this case we can speak not so much about the research results as about a research topos which, apparently, cannot be eradicated from Romanian archaeology. We cannot be so much mistaken to suppose that this conception derives from the *autochthon–migrator* conception (differently: Harhoiu, Spânu, Gáll 2011, 14–16)<sup>30</sup>. This is also a major problem

<sup>28</sup> While he had given a concrete description of the Avars he did not do the same for the Gepids. The question might arise: why not?

<sup>29</sup> The only exception was I. Kovács who attributed the horse burials at Bandu de Câmpie to the invading Avars; cf. Kovács 1913, 387–388.

<sup>30</sup> In most cases this acts as a mental border of civilisations in our archaeology. Its only criticism in Romanian archaeology: Niculescu 2007, 137–138; see also: Berend 2010.

in our Transylvanian archaeology that the concepts of *migration* and *nomadism* are often confused, used interchangeably, although it may seem quite evident that *migration* is a social, temporary phenomenon, whereas *nomadism* is an economic system, with the way of life it implies. As a result of this research attitude, small cemeteries have been defined as *Avar* and cemeteries with a larger number of graves were said to be *Gepid* even in Roska's time, and later, attributed to the *autochthons*<sup>31</sup>, and recently, following the positive German influence after accession to the European Union, they have been declared to be *Gepid* again<sup>32</sup>. The possibility of more complicated socio-cultural phenomena did not even occur to the researchers. The only explanation of the phenomena observed in large cemeteries is that horse burials are *Avar*<sup>33</sup>, associated with *horse breeding peoples* (sic), or with *Avarized Gepids* (Rusu 1962; 1964; Bârzu, Harhoiu 2008; Harhoiu 2010, 156–158). It did not seem plausible that an *autochthonic individual* could be resting in a grave containing a horse burial and weapons because, according to this conception, *autochthonic* people were Christians at this time and in their case heathen customs were out of the question (on the criticism of these theories, see: Harhoiu 2004a). This research tendency is static and groups of people are perceived not as a fluid sociological phenomena but as rigid, unchanging biological reality<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Brateiu Cemetery II, Șpălnaca: Zaharia 1977; see also <http://www.cimec.ro/Arheologie/newcronica2000/indici/cronica.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> One of these is Cemetery III at Bratei, and the exhibition catalogue published in Bistrița (Germ.: Bistritz; Hung.: Beszterce), which has a symbolic title: 'Gepizii'. One example of the research tendencies influenced by the accession to the Union is mentioned by Tivadar Vida: "The collapse of the Communist regime and re-orientation of Hungary towards the European Union re-directed the attention of Hungarian scholars towards the European traditions of the Avar Age [...]"; Vida 2008, 14.

<sup>33</sup> "Studiul antropologic al osemintelor umane exhumate a demonstrat că indivizii înmormântați în 'Șugud' reprezintă populația autohtonă, de origine romanică, din așezarea semnalată în apropiere, peste care s-a suprapus un grup de călăreți avari, cu misiunea de a supraveghea salinele de la Ocna Mureșului", cf. <http://www.cimec.ro/Arheologie/newcronica2000/indici/cronica.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Alpár Dobos tried to find a way out of this dead end of research and criticised this attitude of researchers (Dobos 2010-2011). In contrast with earlier theories A. Dobos (2010-2011, 388) was inclined to expect to find *Merovingian cultural influence* although he writes about it in a cautious manner. We consider it useful that Dobos drew attention to the fact that horse burials are mainly to be explained by social reasons and there is no need to seek an ethnic interpretation (Dobos 2010-2011, 389)! The research attitude of A. Dobos is very useful but has two weaknesses: 1. His interest is limited to the Merovingian Age and to the cultural field (e.g. the terminology *Merovingian* is used twenty times in his text, not to mention that he finds his analogies in the area dominated without exception by the Merovingians); 2. Like the proponents of earlier theories (M. Roska, K. Horedt, R. Harhoiu) A. Dobos does not try to explain the archaeological (technical) term *influence* he uses so many times (Dobos 2010, 389). If the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century historical-geographical conditions are in favour of the theories of *Avar influence* or *Avarization*, which methodically stand very close to the research tendency of *mixed argumentation* (if not being identical with it), the Merovingian influence posited by Dobos requires a more complex manner of thinking and a more complex research attitude, but his failure to spell out the concept of *influence* is a serious flaw.

A few years ago Csanád Bálint drew attention in several publications to the problematic issue of *orient-preference* (Bálint 1999, 13–16; 2004, 246–252; 2007), but this excellent Hungarian researcher did not wish to introduce a *west-preference* among the young generation (the

archaeological interpretation of the *Merovingian cultural domain* can be connected to the topos of *unity*). We thought it important to note because in the period of interest horse burials are recorded in Western Europe (Müller-Wille 1970–1971; Oexle 1984, 122–172; 1992), Great Britain (Fern 2005), the Apennine Peninsula (Genito 2000), Scandinavia (Müller-Wille 1970–1971; Gräslund, Müller-Wille 1992; Andrén 1993), Central Europe (e.g., Freundorf, Rusovce, Šakviče, Žurán on Langobard territory — see Tejral 2009), Eastern Europe and the Baltic region (in Sudovia, Pomerania and Mazovia — see Wyczółkowski, Makowiecki 2009), so why should the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century horse burials be explained with Merovingian *influence* (in general, on the history of horse burials: Steuer 2003)? Special position of the horse has a much older tradition, both in Europe (Gräslund 1980, 48; Røstmo 1997, 305), and in Asia (Fodor 1977, 104, Footnote 53; 2005; van Gulik 2005). There is evidence that the horse was held in special regard in the North, e.g., in Scandinavia, as early as 1300 BC and 1500–1100 (Røstmo 1997, 305; Goldhahn 1999, 150), continuing without a break until 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century (such as Scandinavia, Pomerania, Sudovia, Mazovia; see Hagberg 1967, 55; Ellis Davidson 1982; Shenk 2002, 11–18). Similarly, in Pomerania, Sudovia and Mazovia, it was known well before the Roman Period (Szymański 2005, 126; Gręzak 2007, 359), this is mentioned in several Roman sources (Shenk 2002, 18), but we have far more evidence from the Roman Period and the Migration Period (in Mazuria, Poland, horse burials dating from the Roman Period are known from 14 sites, on the territory of the so-called Bogaczewo culture: Karczewska, Karczewski, Gręzak 2009; Nowakowski 2009, 115–130; Wyczółkowski, Makowiecki 2009, 295; Jaskanis 1966. On horse sacrifice on the territory of the Przeworsk culture, see: Kontny 2009, 92–93; on the territory of the Wielbark culture: Kaczanowski, Kozłowski 1998, 280, 282–283. On horse sacrifice on the territory of the Western Balt cultures, see: Michelbertas 1986, 32, 37–40). Much later, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Wulfstan, traveller and merchant, mentioned the importance of horses in his account on Prussian burial customs, which is supported by later medieval data (Wyczółkowski, Makowiecki 2009, 295). Thus, in the light of all the above sources there is reason to claim that this tradition was not unknown also among the Germanic peoples arrived in Transylvania in the 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries (Gepids) since the earliest archaeological evidence on the people known to classical authors as Gepids (1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries) is to be found on the territory of the Wielbark culture, in the above mentioned regions together with the Goths and other eastern Germanic tribes.

Our view is that the tradition of horse burial and its group psychological (on groups and group psychology see e.g.: Mérei 1971; Lewin 1972; Simmel 1973; Taifel 1981; Turner 1987) continuity within the Germanic communities is documented conclusively by evidence from archaeology and classical written sources. There are customs which exist, similar to small streams, sometimes disappearing and then reappearing again. The archaeological observation of a phenomenon cannot be considered absolute: if we cannot document a custom using archaeological means this does not mean that this custom was unknown in a given society. Such a continuous phenomenon can be postulated in relation to horse burial and buried horses. This observation seems to be supported by the presence of horse trappings in the elite (royal ?) grave from Apahida and by symbolic horse graves Nos. 1 and 7 at Hódmezővásárhely (Horedt, Protase 1972, 174–220; Bóna 1976, 62, 100–101, Dr. 4, Fig. 8, 14, 17, 19–21; Harhoiu 1997, 158–159; definitely these burials can be interpreted as Hunnic *influence*). Like other customs, this one may have been connected to the better, or worse, economic possibilities of a community or to the theoretical-ethical mainstreams of the Early Middle Ages (e.g. Christianity). To conclude: horse burials in the so called *row graves* (*Reihengräberfelder*) are seen by the author as archaeological evidence of an economic situation which might have been connected to social phenomena in a community whose materialization can be connected to well-being, but these were founded on *theoretical bases already existing*, i.e. customs in connection with horses had been known and esteemed highly. Certainly, considering their temporal parallels, horse burials might be connected to the invading Avars, this is proven by such archaeological contexts as Špálnaca and Verešmort, but it also seems certain that an already existing custom had been revived. These different group identities changed, or, through complicated socio-cultural processes difficult to follow archeologically, new group identity/identities took form around the onset of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, in which both the conquerors and the conquered participated and a part of the latter allied themselves with the conquerors.



As mentioned earlier, archaeologists are ready to identify *Avarized Gepids* in larger cemeteries (Horedt 1958a; 1958b; 1968; 1977; 1986; Harhoiu 2010; Hica 1974; Gaiu 1992, 122) and to date the arrival of the Avars in Transylvania to after AD 630<sup>35</sup>. The more recent finds from Vereşmort and the Mongoloid features of the skull (Rustoiu, Ciută 2008), Mongoloid skulls discovered by Szabolcs Nagy in the cemeteries at Luna<sup>36</sup>, and features of the burial rite and material culture observed in the cemetery at Bratei which may be considered Avar<sup>37</sup> (Bârzu 2010, 37–41; Harhoiu 2010), and finally, the finds from the cemetery at Şpălnaca, expose the weakness of this theory, namely: 1. if we consider the logical point of view, how and by whom can a population be Avarized, how can they borrow customs from another population (identified by archaeologists as Avar) if they are not in contact with that population?; 2. The economic role of the Transylvanian Basin has been misinterpreted or is ignored: in contrast with other opinions Roska argued also that the occupation and the settling of Transylvania was a *historical necessity* from an economic point of view<sup>38</sup> and it came with cultural demographic consequences and, with time, gave rise to new *group identities*<sup>39</sup>. However, this could not have happened without the Avar conquest!

<sup>35</sup> Madgearu 2011, 248: “Purely Avar cemeteries appeared in Transylvania only after 630”.

<sup>36</sup> We owe this intelligence to Szabolcs Nagy and Szilárd Gál.

<sup>37</sup> The largest and the most complex cemetery among them is the one at Bratei, with approximately 294 graves. The following arguments seem to contradict Harhoiu's conception (Harhoiu 2010, 149–159): 1. The map of distribution of double-edged sword finds and complete horse burials demonstrates that these two burial practices are never seen in the same group of graves suggesting they were practiced in parallel by two communities with different traditions. In our opinion, as these two kinds of rites are not found in the same groups of graves but can both be found in both the eastern and the western area of the cemetery, although in different groups, we can assume two communities with two different cultural traditions, values and a different view on the afterworld; 2. The pike, a typical weapon of the mounted warrior, classified by Gergely Csiky as Type L. I., is known from Graves 175, 201, 218, 278 and 283 (Csiky 2013, 79). In horse graves or in graves with horses in them, it is often found with other weapons and parts of equestrian gear (stirrups, bits, harness ornaments). This burial tradition was registered at Bratei in Grave 175 (string buckle, harness strap distributor, pike), 201 (pike), 278 (harness strap distributor, bit, string buckle, stirrup, pike) and 283 (bit, pike). In this group more notable is a burial custom observed in Grave 278 which fully coincides with the Avar customs. This tradition differs from those with double-edged swords in them, not just because there are no horses in the latter, but it can also indicate that, next to the tradition of cavalry warfare, the tradition of non-equestrian burial also lingered (which is an archaeological reflection of group identity), where horses or their parts are missing.

In our opinion, the cemetery at Bratei was used by at least two peoples, each with its own tradition. The roots of these traditions are clearly different, one evidently similar to Avar burials, the other attributable to Germanic burial practices.

<sup>38</sup> “[...] Transylvania is not only a passage, it is also a shelter, it could always provide acceptable living conditions, when conquered it did not fall out of its natural role, it receives cultural elements together with the conquerors, joining the culture of far distant lands, it also creates as it has the outer properties and it plays a dominant role with its gold, silver, salt, iron - those who found living conditions similar to their earlier lifestyle, settled to remain here for a longer period. This is shown by the cemeteries too”, cf. Roska 1936a, 156–157.

<sup>39</sup> Roska also emphasizes that ‘the artery of Transylvania’ may have been in connection with the gold mining centres; see Roska 1936a, 156.

Based on certain elements of material culture (ceramic) the presence of acculturated Slavs borrowing Avar or Gepid customs cannot be discounted in the cemetery at Bratei. Elements of material culture indicating this group identity are observed in the cemetery at Mezőbánd, dated by István Bóna (1930-2001) to as early as 600-630 (Bóna 1988, 176; Bakó 1962). Certainly, acculturation does not mean a one way sociological process: this is suggested by the graves of goldsmiths found in Avar cemeteries, as this tradition was not of eastern origin (Bálint 2012, 312). Certainly, it might seem legitimate to interpret all these cases as Germanic but their archaeological context refutes this assumption (Rácz 2013, 361-380).

Returning to the question of horse burials we can draw two important conclusions, based on their large number: 1. The large cemeteries without ethnic markers found in the Transylvanian Basin datable to the period 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century can mean one thing only: stability, which is the base of economic growth and well-being, which can be connected to the wealth seen in archaeological finds; 2. Avar rule did not mean disaster either for Transylvania or other regions, contrary to the conclusions of some archaeologists, proponents of the disaster theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>40</sup>. The new Avar power moulded the population of the Carpathian Basin into a complicated system in a new constellation of power, which is clearly shown by the many peoples who took part in the Byzantine raids and this clearly testifies to a gradual sociological phenomenon, the creation of a new group identity, the European Avar ethnos.

Another segment of Roska's interpretation of ethnic names and the finds from archaeological excavations proved to be a complete failure (even back at that time), namely that "[...] in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD the Slavs spread across Transylvania in a thin layer" (Roska 1936a, 157). Nevertheless, this might have been the reason why the possibility of co-existence, relationship or mingling of the Slavs and the Avars did not even occur to the Transylvanian Hungarian-Armenian archaeologist, although later I. Bóna came to this conclusion with regard to 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century graves excavated by M. Roska at Gâmbaş (Bóna 1988, 171).

However, as an archaeologist, Roska was like any other scholar, a man of his times: he did not question the cultural unification of ethnic phenomena. The Hungarian-Armenian archaeologist did not even suspect any type of group identity (such as social classes) other than the ones that existed in his day.

Chronologically, in Hungarian archaeology we are far from Béla Szőke<sup>41</sup>!

<sup>40</sup> Their list is too long to go into here.

<sup>41</sup> B. Szőke was the first Hungarian archaeologist to consider the structure of 10<sup>th</sup>-century society as vertical rather than horizontal: the leader class, the warrior middle class, the commoners; see Szőke 1962; for an analysis of Szőke's works: Langó 2005, 219–221; 2007, 125–128.

The interpretation of political structures,  
power centres and populations  
and the connection between these terms

It is apparent, from his works too, that as a man of his age Roska supposed a close connection between the peoples' names and political structures mentioned in the written sources, i.e. for him, the names of people were identical with political-military institutions, although there were much more coloured realities and more varied group identities behind these ethnic names (Brathér 2004, 156). And so, when Roska speaks of Avars he has in mind not only the Avar as a people, but (and perhaps especially) the Avar political power.

The existence of an outlying political Avar centre in Transylvania, in touch with and dependent on a central seat, is suggested by the following data (see Fig. 2-3):

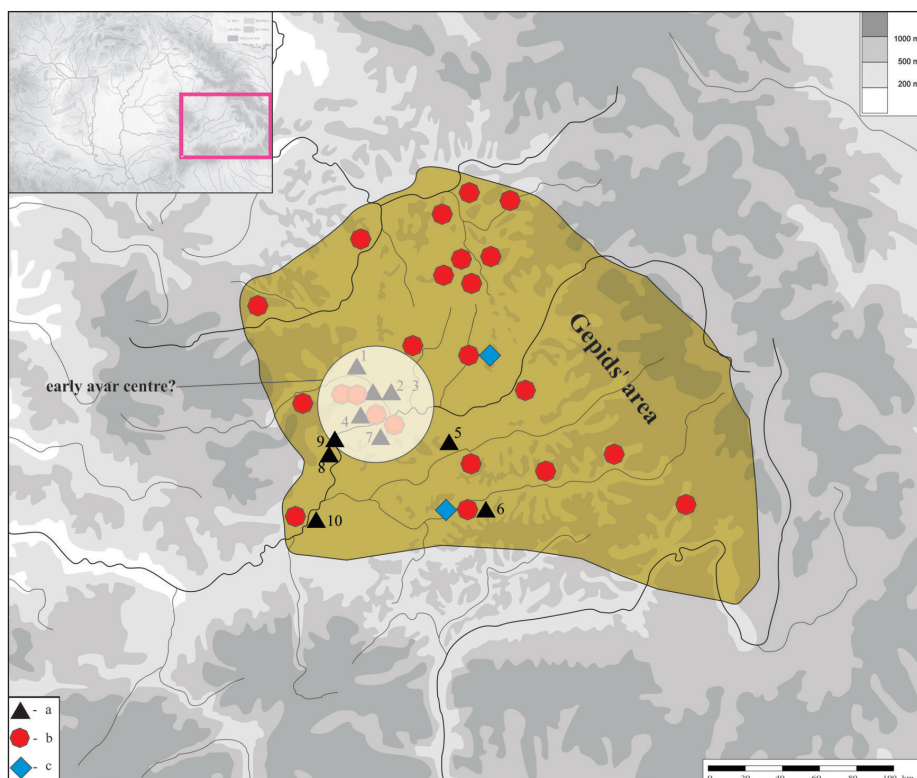


Fig. 2. Early Avar cemeteries, graves and stray finds from the Transylvanian Basin and Gepid cemeteries from the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries (*Reihengräberfelder*); after R. Harhoiu (2010); drawn by N. Laczkó and E. Gáll.

a — early Avars; b — late Gepids (*Reihengräberfelder*); c — early Slavs.

Early Avar sites (j. — județul; R. — Romania): 1 — Turda, j. Cluj, R.; 2–3 — Luna, j. Cluj, R.; 4 — Unirea-Vereshmort, j. Alba, R.; 5 — Târnăveni, j. Mureș, R.; 6 — Bratei, j. Sibiu, R.; 7 — Șpálnaca, j. Alba, R.; 8 — Ștremț, j. Alba, R.; 9 — Aiud, județul Alba; 10 — Alba Iulia, j. Alba, R.

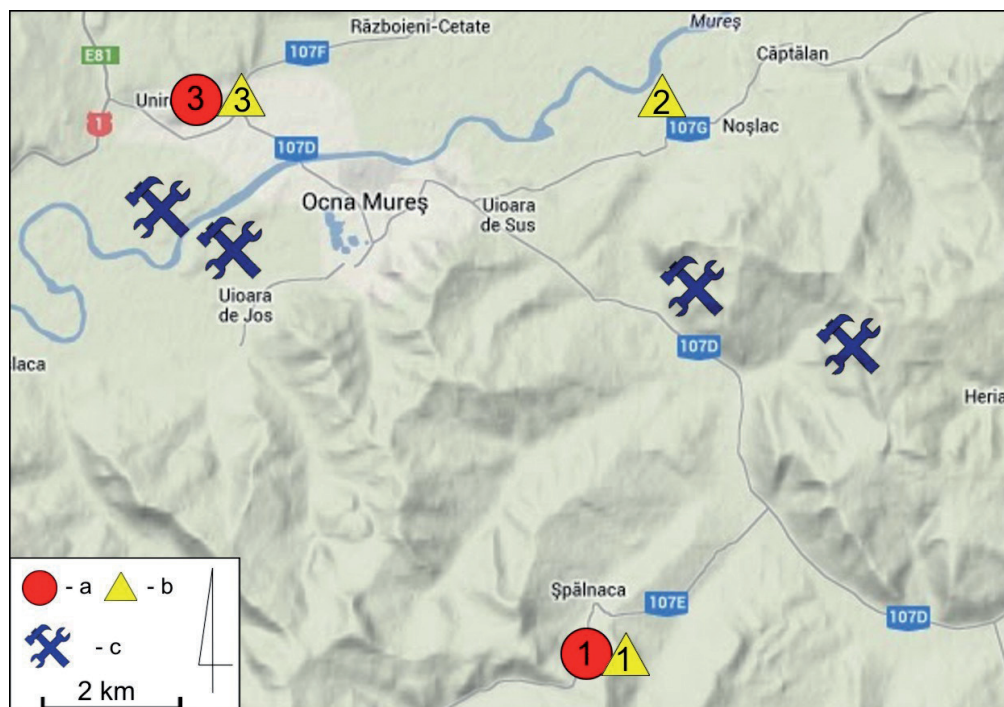


Fig. 3. The earliest Avar sites from Unirea-Vereșmort, Noșlac and Șpălnaca; drawn by E. Gáll and P. Jarosz.

a — Avars; b — Germans; c — possible salt deposits.

1 — Unirea-Vereșmort, județul Alba, Romania; 2 — Noșlac, județul Alba, Romania; 3 — Șpălnaca, județul Alba, Romania

Five sites are known in the Middle Mureș and Arieș region *datable to the early Avar 1st phase*, complemented by some Gepid cemeteries from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries used parallel to them (Luna, Noșlac, Unirea-Vereșmort). Based on the micro-regional location of these cemeteries and apparently single graves there are more and more concrete signs of an early peripheral heterogeneous Avar centre in Transylvania which can be connected with the Avar centre. The existence of an Avar centre in the triangle of Unirea-Vereșmort, Noșlac and Șpălnaca apparently finds confirmation in early Avar horse burials and graves attributable to Gepid warriors furnished with double-edged swords and lances<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 4–7). In the case of the characteristic Avar burials we can suppose complete horse burials (Șpălnaca), and partial horse burials (Unirea-Vereșmort-2008), which allows us to suppose that the population of the Avar power conquering the middle part of Transylvania might have had heterogeneous customs (and, possibly, origins). We tried to organise the data accessible to us in the following system (see Table 3):

<sup>42</sup> The site at Noșlac remains unpublished and the number of graves with horse burials, lances and swords is unknown.



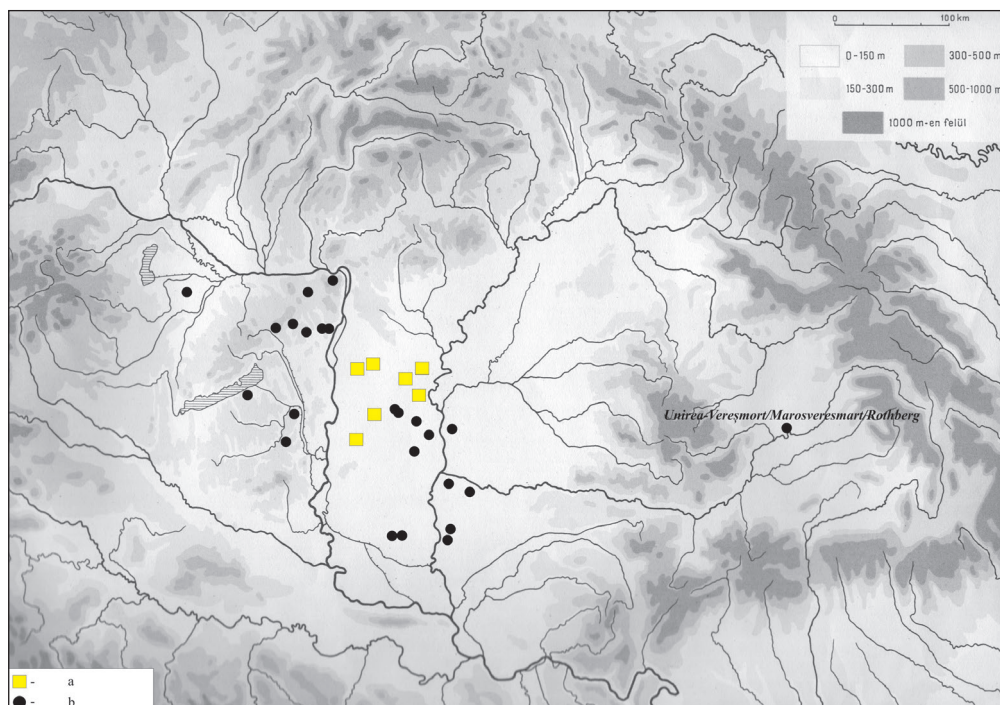


Fig. 4. Early Avar swords with gold and silver hilt plates from the Carpathian Basin; after L. Simon (1991) and T. Vida (2009); drawn by E. Gáll.

a — gold hilt plate; b — silver hilt plate

The Avar finds (Némethi, Klima 1987–89, 176–177, Fig. 1) from Târnăveni (Bakó 1965, 370; Horedt 1968, 108, Fig. 2:1–2, 117, No. I:24; Bóna 1988, 164, Pl. 30:1–2), the pyre find from Ştremţ (Nagy 1913, 271; Horedt 1956, 397; 1958b, 103; Popa 1961, 225–226), single graves from Alba Iulia (Bóna 1988, Fig. 8), two graves in the part of the cemetery at Aiud (Horedt 1958b, 91–92, Table 10; Bóna 1988, 168) and horse burials with lances and horses from Bratei which indicate the expansion of the Transylvanian Avar centre at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century may be dated to the 1st, possibly, 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Early Avar Period (600–630; cf. Stadler 2008, 59, Tab. 1).

Consequently it does not seem far fetched to claim that in the Middle Mureş region we can suspect a peripheral power centre of the Early Avar Period<sup>43</sup>. It is best indicated by the large number of weapon and horse burials and buried horses (Fig. 2–4).

<sup>43</sup> I. Bóna proposed to locate this early Avar centre in the valley of the Târnava Mică (Hung.: Kis-Küküllő; Germ.: Kleine Kokel; River; see Bóna 1988, 164–165.

Table 3

Markers of Avar and Gepid identity in burials

Site/Grave	Avar tradition (horse or only horse bones, votive deposit pit) Avar weapons (one-edged sword, quiver, three-bladed arrow heads)	Gepid tradition Gepid weapons: double-edged sword, lance Gepid or other female accessories, cultural traditions
Ștremț	x	
Gâmbaș horse grave	x	
Gâmbaș Grave No. 3		x
Gâmbaș Grave No. 5		x
Gâmbaș Grave No. 9	x	
Șpălnaca Grave No. 10		x
Șpălnaca Grave No. 19	x	
Șpălnaca Grave No. 37	x	
Unirea–Vereșmort — 1914 Grave No. 5		x
Unirea–Vereșmort — 1914 Grave No. 13		x
Unirea–Vereșmort — 1914 Grave No. 14		x
Unirea–Vereșmort — Grave from 2008	x	
Aiud-Viticulture School Grave No. 1	x	
Aiud-Viticulture School Grave No. 2	x	
Noșlac graves with swords		xxxxx

The analysis of the excavated cemeteries.  
Roska's chronological observations  
and the current status of research

Roska's chronological observations

Taking his cue from I. Kovács M. Roska concluded that Transylvania was occupied by the Avars in what he called the *first wave* (i.e. at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century; see Roska 1936a, 154). In connection with this historical and ar-



chaeological fact we must make mention of possibly the earliest Transylvanian finds and sites which can be considered Avar<sup>44</sup>, bearing in mind the horse burial recently discovered at Vereşmort, the cemetery at Ispánlak and the four cemeteries at Luna (Aranyoslóna) which contain 622 graves altogether, although as yet unpublished, but two of them can be dated reliably to the Early/Middle Avar Period<sup>45</sup>.

The grave at Vereşmort was dated broadly to the 7<sup>th</sup> century but to judge from the publication of this burial it is more likely to belong in its final decades (Rustoiu, Ciută 2008, 90–91; see also Fig. 4–5). The grave of a 25–30 year old male discovered at Unirea-Vereşmort in somewhat humorous circumstances<sup>46</sup> was saved for archaeology by two Romanian archaeologists, Tiberiu Rustoiu and Marius Ciută, is dated to late 6<sup>th</sup> — first quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (on the dating of early Avar swords see: Simon 1991, 263–346) by its grave goods (a one-edged sword<sup>47</sup> with a silver hilt plate and a ring pommel,<sup>48</sup> and Martynovka belt ornaments, mail coat, a horse, some bits, a pair of spurs). According to a survey made by Gergely Csiky, forty parallels to one-edged swords ornamented with silver plates are known from the Transdanubian region (19) and the Great Plain (21) datable to the Early Avar Period (Csiky 2009, 121). The counterparts of swords with an iron ring pommel embedded in the silver hilt-plate were discovered at the following locations (see Fig. 5:1)<sup>49</sup>: Bócsa, Kecel, Nagykovács, Nagylászi<sup>50</sup>. It is important that in the case of our specimen there is no cross guard (cross guards are characteristic for swords with an iron ring pommel; cf. Csiky 2009, 122), and the hilt ring has not

<sup>44</sup> For a list of possibly the earliest Avar burials in the Carpathian Basin see: Bálint 1995, 310. On the early Avar period and early Avar burials see: Kovrig 1963; Bóna 1970, 243–261; Salamon, Erdélyi 1971; Bóna 1980; 1983; Garam 1983; 1993; Daim 2003, 465–487.

<sup>45</sup> Lecture given by Sz. Nagy at the 9<sup>th</sup> Hungarian Archaeological Conference in Transylvania; see Nagy 2011.

<sup>46</sup> The local resident in Vereşmort who discovered the inhumation thought that it was a victim of a murder and notified the police. The criminologist and policemen who arrived at the site also identified the burial as a murder victim and thought that the sword placed on his left side during the burial ceremony was the actual *murder weapon*. We are convinced that some of the details communicated to the archaeologists from this ‘romantic’ excavation, namely, that the skeleton retained the sword in its grip, is best omitted from literature; cf. Rustoiu, Ciută 2008, 73.

<sup>47</sup> One-edged swords were narrower, lighter and required less iron, which probably made them less expensive. Their advantage over double-edged swords is obvious, but they also had a major disadvantage: to administer two blows one had to rotate the wrist 180 degrees, moreover, the blade, triangular or pentagonal in cross section, is not suitable for stabbing; see Csiky 2009, 121.

<sup>48</sup> Swords with a ring pommel spread in the Far East during the 4<sup>th</sup> century and remained popular until the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In their tradition they went back several centuries, to the Zhan Guo Ce era (481–222 BC), becoming more popular in during the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD); cf. Csiky 2009, 154, Footnote 919.

<sup>49</sup> The Transylvanian find was added to the map, see: Simon 1991, Fig. 7–8; Vida 2009, Fig. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, we have to set right Gergely Csiky’s Note 721 which states that a sword of this description is known in the Transylvanian Basin, from Noşlac; see Csiky 2009, 123, Footnote 721.

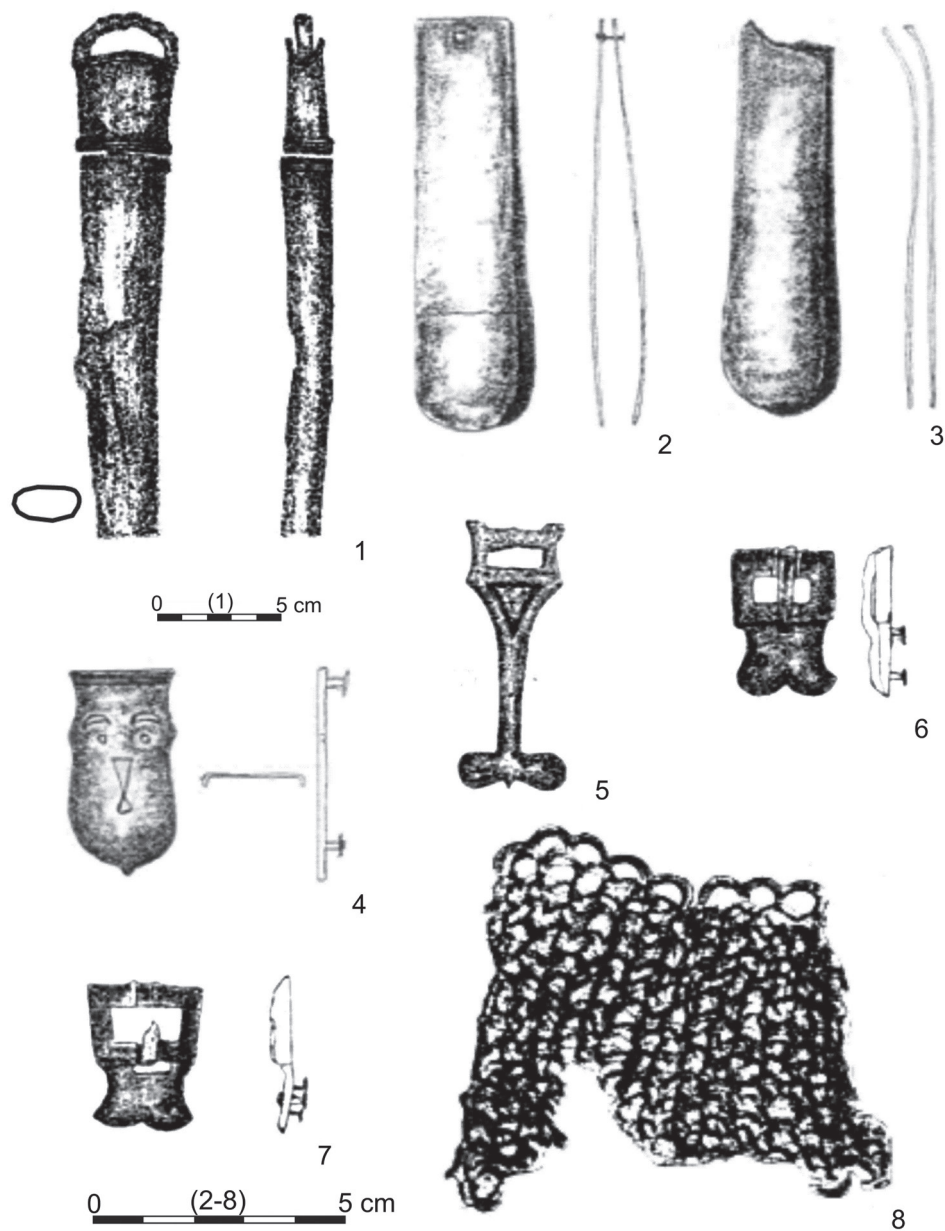


Fig. 5. Unirea-Vereșmort, județul Alba, Romania. Grave inventory excavated in 2008; after G. T. Rustoiu, M. Ciută (2008, Pl. 1–2, 7)

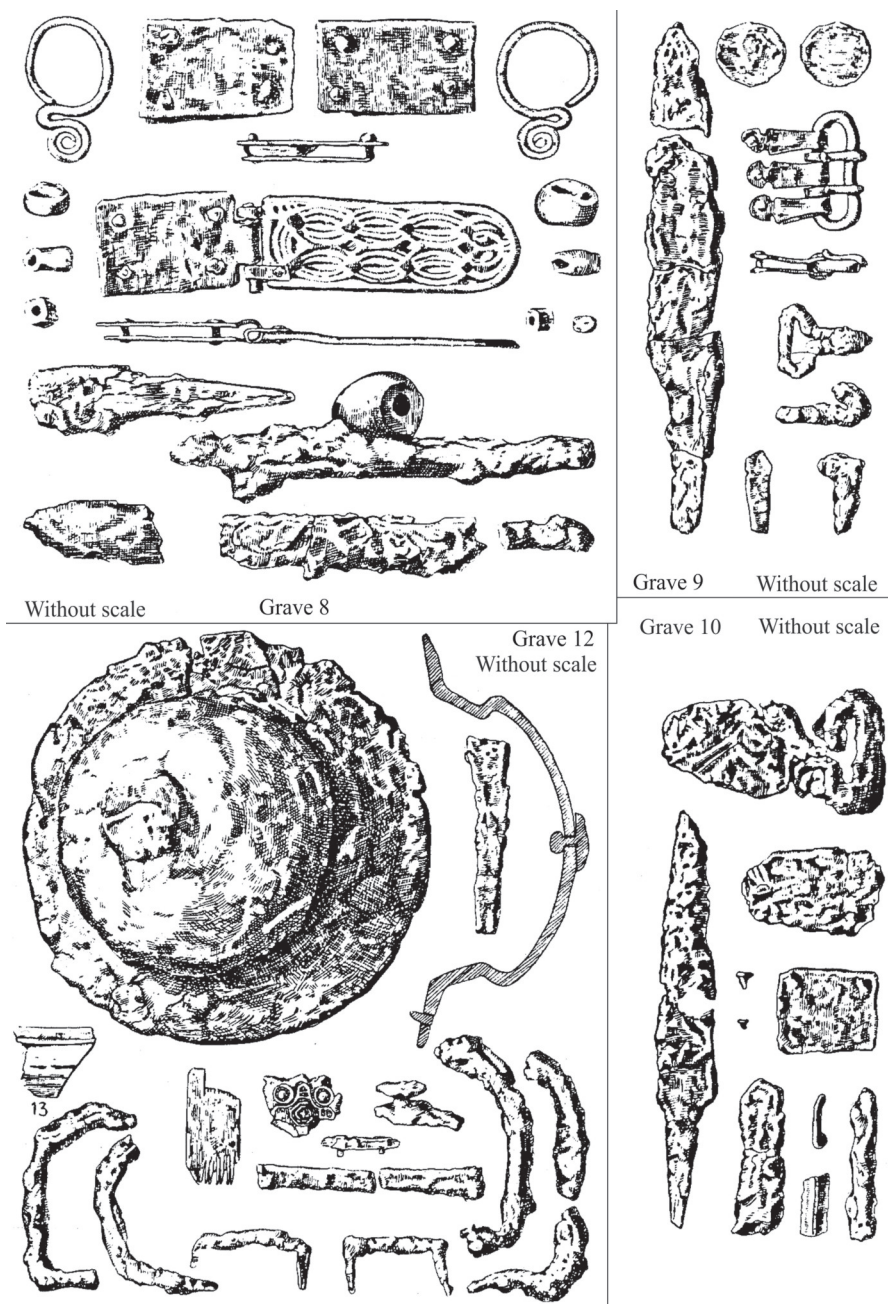


Fig. 6. Unirea-Vereșmort, județul Alba, Romania. Grave inventories excavated in 1914; after M. Roska (1932)



Fig. 7. Unirea-Vereşmort, judeţul Alba, Romania. Grave inventories excavated in 1914;  
after M. Roska (1932)

been made from the iron of the hilt, but it was attached to the silver plate, solely for this purpose. The sword made with special technical workmanship<sup>51</sup>, the Martynovka belt ornaments and the Mongoloid features of the skull also seem to date the grave to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and connected it with the first two conquering Avar generations<sup>52</sup>. To be sure the dating proposed here is only approximate as there is the possibility that the elements of the belt set could have been acquired by their owner late in life. On the other hand, even if this Avar individual died in 605 or 615 this does not necessarily mean that he came to Transylvania at that time! For instance, if we take 605 as the year when he died and we consider him to be 30 years old, then he must have been born in 575, and consequently, could be from the first two generations of the conquering Avars mentioned earlier<sup>53</sup> (see Fig. 5).

The cemetery, or its fragment, at Șpălnaca, with its 39 graves is similarly important (Protase et al. 2000). Grave No. 10 at Șpălnaca, burial of a 30–35 year old male, is dated by a bronze coin of Justin II (565–578) to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Graves Nos. 19 and 37 held the burials of a horse and its rider, placed in separate graves. Next to them were also graves where the horse and man were buried together (Graves Nos. 19 and 39) complete with the lance, a weapon characteristic for the Avar era (Grave No. 19). These graves can also be dated to the period on the turn of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Two of the four cemeteries at Luna (Aranyoslóna), huge by Transylvanian standards<sup>54</sup>, can be dated reliably to the early Avar age and the presence of the population of the Gepid Period can also be detected in at least two cemeteries<sup>55</sup>.

The pyre-finds from Ștremț and Târnăveni are similarly early and may be regarded as marks of a group identity of the first two generations of the Avars (Bakó 1965, 370; Horedt 1968, 108, Fig. 2:1–2, 117, No. I:24; Bóna 1988, 164, Pl. 30:1–2); the gold earrings from Turda can also be connected to this horizon (Garam 1993, 69, No. 43, Pl. 33:1–2).

<sup>51</sup> In their study of the grave discovered at Unirea-Vereșmort, Gabriel Tiberiu Rustoiu and Marius Ciută write, using information from other sources, that the crime site investigator and the policemen tried to bend the sword (their suspected murder weapon), but without success; cf. Rustoiu, Ciută 2008, 71, Pl. 1–2.

<sup>52</sup> At this point both the archaeologists who published the grave and Alexandru Madgearu are of a different opinion. Radu Harhoiu also suggests a dating close to ours, for which we are grateful to him; see Rustoiu, Ciută 2008, 90–91; Madgearu 2011, 194–195, 197.

<sup>53</sup> As a result of mixed argumentation, another problematic issue is that the Avar conquest and immigration was considered not as a prolonged, multi-step sociological process but one linked to various dates with a firm insistence on the narrative sources.

<sup>54</sup> Maps presented by Sz. Nagy indicate that these cemeteries were not excavated fully. We may safely conclude that in the four cemeteries there were c. 1500 graves. The excavations of Sz. Nagy suggest that in most cases cemeteries from the early Avar era were larger than we used to think.

<sup>55</sup> Thanks to the work of Sz. Nagy the ceramic material from one of the cemeteries was used to identify the cemetery as Gepid dating it to the 6<sup>th</sup> century; see Nagy 2011.



In our view, cemeteries and single finds, which may indicate extremely rich graves will clarify the problem of the beginning of the Avar rule in Transylvania unless we interpret these finds in terms of *wandering riders*. To be sure, we cannot specify the exact date when Avar domination started, but at present it is evident that this happened after 568 (similarly Bóna 1988, 168–171; 1989, 84–87), as Avar rule definitely integrated the different populations of the region into a single political structure (see Fig. 2, 4).

Basing on the above data, studies of I. Bóna and R. Harhoiu as well as on recently published data we suggest the following chronology and funeral presentation of group identities, which also indicates that the main characteristic of this era is heterogeneity (see Table 4).

Table 4

Chronological table of Early Avar Period (EAP) cemeteries and single graves from Transylvania  
(↓ — the archaeological site was used also in a later period)

Stadler's new chronology and the chronology of the cemeteries of the assumed Avar centre — Early Avar sites (see Fig. 2)	Avars	Late Gepids/ Germanic people (after 568)	Early Slavs?
EAP 568–600	Luna (↓), Șpălnaca (↓), Târnăveni (↓), Unirea-Vereșmort- 2008 (↓)?	Bandu de Câmpie (↓), Bratei (↓), Luna (↓), Noșlac (↓), UnireaVereșmort- 1914	
EAP 600–630	Aiud, Bratei (?), Luna (↓), Gâmbaș (↓) Unirea-Vereșmort- 2008?	Bandu de Câmpie, Bratei (↓), Luna (↓), Noșlac (↓), Gâmbaș (↓)	Bratei (?)(↓) Bandu de Câmpie (see Bakó 1962, 455–457)
EAP 568–630	Ștremț?, Alba Iulia?, Turda?		

\* \* \*

M. Roska was the first archaeologist to claim, basing on archaeological finds and going against the general opinion at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that Hungarians had moved into the Transylvanian Basin as early in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.



Let us recall that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century historians (Karácsonyi 1896, 456–483) concluded that the Hungarian migration (more precisely, the occupation of the Transylvanian Basin) did not happen in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (*a vezérek korában* = in the age of the chiefs or leaders), only later when the Western Christian type Hungarian state was established, in other words, only after the campaign of Saint Stephen against Gyula in 1003. M. Roska argued that these ideas were incompatible with archaeological finds, which definitely are characteristic for the *conquering Magyars*. In his day, the accepted view was that a *typical Hungarian* from the 10<sup>th</sup> century was an individual buried with his weapons and his horses, while individuals with no weapons in their grave were identified as *subjugated Slavs*. This idea may be seen to persist in modern Romanian archaeology, the only difference is that burials without weapons are interpreted as Romanian or Christian (for the historiography on the subject see Langó 2007, 61–135). Nevertheless, even today certain funeral rites and features of material culture as archaeological expressions are considered to be distinctively *Hungarian* features (Daim, Lauer mann 2006; Révész 2006, 297–302) which can be traced chronologically from the Vienna Basin (Gnaden-dorf) to the Transylvanian Basin (Cluj-Napoca, Zápolya Street, or in Alba Iulia, Stația de Salvare).

#### Roska's interpretation of cemeteries

The archaeological and historical interpretation of cemeteries forms another important aspect of Roska's studies. In these analyses we can see two interpretations proposed by him.

*Cemeteries as evidence of a migration:* like the route of the Terving occupation of Transylvania, finds attributable to the conquering Hungarians in the land of the Szeklers signify settlement, etc. (Roska 1936a, 151; 1936b, 163).

*Cemeteries as evidence of settlement, villages:* these cemeteries do not harbour the remains of heroes slain in battle but inhabitants of larger settlements and villages. This is what Roska argued for the cemeteries found at Hunedoara and Moldovenesti and in his synthesis on the Migration Period in 1936, namely that the cemeteries document stability (Roska 1936a, 157; 1936b, 170). In the case of graves and groups of graves that can be considered *nomadic*, which is supported by recent observations too<sup>56</sup>, other interpretations are also possible and this is a subject for future researches.

At the same time, Roska stressed the close connection between cemeteries and living conditions, independent of any age: "[...] it is not a pure coincidence

<sup>56</sup> In many cases small graveyards and single graves are in evidence as late as in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

that at Mezőbánd, Marosvásárhely, Marosgombás there is a Scythian layer under the Migration Period layer” (Roska 1936a, 157).

It is important to note that, as opposed to his romantic conception mentioned in A, based on his views emphasized in B still valid today, Roska, and his friend István Kovács too, may be considered the forerunners of modern Eastern European archaeology.

### Roska and the analysis of material culture

The object-centred method of analysis is characteristic for the third period of Roska's early medieval researches (1940–1944). This tendency can be observed in the analyses of a pair of Avar spurs found at Heria as a single find, the belt ornament and trapeze-shaped spurs from Periam and the sword chape from Alba Iulia (Roska 1943; 1944a; 1944b).

*Technical continuity*, the connection of the technique of studding with Mediterranean culture, which he suggested in the publication on the spurs found in Periam (Roska 1943, 141, Footnote 11), were influenced by Roska's knowledge of prehistory and his good information.

The assumption of *cultural diffusion* (the theory of F. Boas — see Boas 1911; Goldschmidt [ed.] 1959) and/or *the possibility of commercial connections* took up much space in his last work (Roska 1944b). In this study it can be clearly seen that he himself could not decide whether it is the result of commercial connections or a concrete proof of the Hungarian migration, or it is a find from a later time period, from the 10<sup>th</sup> or the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is clear from his papers written between 1940 and 1944 that he was influenced by the analyses of Ture Johnsson Arne (1879–1965), Peter Paulsen (1902–1985) and N. Fettich and he drew on them (Arne 1913; Paulsen 1933; Fettich 1937; 1938; 1942). We can see the influence of the works of Arne and Paulsen in the data list used by Roska (Krasnoyarsk, Treyden, Gotland, Öland, Courland) and that he used their data bases, moreover, Fettich's influence is felt when Roska mentions the parallels for the palmetto representation on the scabbard chape from the Minusinsk Basin. In contrast to Fettich, but agreeing, at the same time, with this outstanding Hungarian archaeologist of the interbellum period<sup>57</sup> who interpreted the two-edged swords as Viking-Norman influence, Roska dated the sword chape from Alba Iulia to the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, attributing it to a warrior of the time of Saint Stephen, which definitely is a fine case of a mixed argumentation.

However, Roska's last work on the age of the Hungarian conquest, like his two earlier works, meant definite progress in Transylvanian archaeology in two

<sup>57</sup> The positive influence of N. Fettich on Roska is evidenced by his evaluation of Fettich's 1938 study as '*excellent*'. In the same note Roska makes a cold remark about Gy. László's, article confirming that the relationship of the two was far from friendly; see Roska 1944b, 106, Footnote 47.

aspects: 1. We know of no similarly comprehensive analysis of individual elements of material culture in Transylvanian archaeology; 2. Reference literature used by Roska indicates comprehensive knowledge unmatched in the earlier period (not to mention Gy. László, his contemporary), and it became unmatched again after 1946.

### On the forerunner of multidisciplinary

In the opening sentence of his 1936 synthesis on the period of the Hungarian conquest Roska emphasizes the significance of a *multidisciplinary* research tendency. His assertion that “Our chronicle writers, earlier and contemporary historians and linguists all discuss the Hungarian conquest in Transylvania. Archaeology plays a major role in the solution of this problem, moreover, folklore and anthropology have to contribute to this work soon” (Roska 1936b, 163), has not come true until this day.

The importance of anthropology in archaeological research was recognised earlier, well before the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to be more exact, anthropological analyses had accompanied archaeological research on the Hungarian conquest since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Langó 2005, 258–259; 2007, 182–183), in many cases amateurs also participated in data collection: for example, Gyula Kisléghi Nagy (1861–1918) had transported to Budapest several skeletons dating from prehistoric times, the Migration Period and time of the Hungarian conquest (Kisléghi Nagy 2010, 150). It is also important to note that the relationship of the representatives of archaeology and anthropology was not very good, in one case it was an amateur who fell victim to it, namely, Kisléghi<sup>58</sup>. In the case of the Transylvanian school more studies are needed to determine why there was no cooperation with anthropological research: 1. Was the founding father uninterested in anthropology? 2. Were there plans to establish an institute in Cluj, independent of the Budapest Institute of Anthropology?<sup>59</sup> The second explanation is probably the case.

M. Roska cannot have stood far from this research attitude and his observation made in 1936 is the best example of this. It can probably be connected to the plan of his master, mentioned in the preceding note, i.e. Pósta's school did not follow the *Hampelian* school founded by József Hampel (1849–1913) and the way of thinking typical for the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kisléghi Nagy 2010, 143; Gáll 2010b, 194). B. Pósta's plans were brought to naught by the peace treaty of Versailles at end of World War I. In the ensuing period the inheritor state was preoccupied more with the policy on science than

<sup>58</sup> “I don't know anything about bones therefore I don't publish a word about the bones”, cf. Kisléghi 2010, 143; see also Gáll 2010b, 194.

<sup>59</sup> This finds support in a letter written by B. Pósta. Acknowledgements to Zoltán Vincze for this piece of intelligence.

with science itself, as evidenced by the letters of V. Pârvan (1983, 275; see also Anghelincu 2003, 127, Footnote 397).

## WITHOUT CONCLUSIONS

By analysing Roska's works we tried to gain a glimpse of some sensitive issues of early medieval archaeology and insight into the present status of research. We are not shocked that less than a century ago (from 1912 to 1944) Márton Roska drew rigid ethnic (biological) frames or that he did not mention the complicated Avar–Gepid or Avar–Slav relationships. But we are shocked that this tendency has changed little in Romanian and, more particularly, in Transylvanian archaeology, even though it was a tendency widespread in Eastern European archaeology after 1945 (from this point of view see: Bálint 2004, 326, Footnote 1023): as we have already mentioned, the majority of the Transylvanian archaeologists consider and describe ethnic frames not as a fluid sociological phenomenon but as rigid, unchanging biological reality, and this huge backwardness in theoretical-methodological tendencies has been aggravated by the topos of the autochthon-Christian-settled Romanised, proto-Romanian and Romanian population formulated back during the 19th century and revived in a major way during the 1960s with the coming into power of Dej and Ceausescu (this tendency was criticised by Boia in 1999, for an alternative view see, e.g.: Niculescu 2009; Harhoiu, Spânu, Gáll 2011).

In short, the sensitive issues outlined above do not expose the deficiency of M. Roska's level of research but do show that Romanian archaeology after World War II lagged behind and today it is still peripheral. This should be changed. If we can change it at all...

Can we? Since the time of the Renaissance development has been connected to material consequences. As a result of this process in the 19th century a new type of man emerged, more radical than his predecessors: *the new man*. Backed by the modern state the new man turns against the values of earlier societies. However, serving the state propaganda, he made huge efforts to get to know earlier ages. 'Never in the course of history had man been placed in vital surroundings even remotely familiar to those set up by the conditions just mentioned. We are, in fact, confronted with a radical innovation in human destiny, implanted by the 19th century [...] the man who is the product of the 19th is, for the effects of public life, a man apart from all other men' so Ortega y Gasset in his *La rebelión de las masas* (Ortega y Gasset 1995, 37–38)<sup>60</sup>. This new type of man is unable to understand the medieval people, how can he understand the way of thinking or the values of a 6th-cen-

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<sup>60</sup> The antimodernist Carl Braig's remark may be appropriate here that modernism is "[...] blind to everything that is not identical to it or doesn't serve it"; see Braig 1990, 37.

ture Avar or a conquering Hungarian? We are writing these lines sceptically: even if we use scientific methods, we can only know the past as much as the future: its *skeleton*... only its *skeleton*.

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 DENME Dolgozatok Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából, Kolozsvár.  
 EM Erdélyi Múzeum, Kolozsvár.  
 KENME Közlemények az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából, Kolozsvár.  
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